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ABSTRACT

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 and the Goals 2000: Educate America Act both encourage the creation of school-to-work partnerships. This article outlines the design of effective school-to-work programs and the roles of its participants. Three components of school-to-work programs include work-based learning, school-based learning, and connecting activities. The article describes hands-on activities for local school boards, the kinds of grants available to states and local communities, and the role of the employer community. A conclusion is that the creation of school-business partnerships should remain a voluntary, local matter. Through personal and direct business contacts, local school boards can play a strong leadership role in forming the most effective school-to-work programs. A sidebar offers recommendations for the National Skills Standards Board, which was established by Goals 2000: (1) conduct board actions on a regional basis; and (2) facilitate voluntary partnerships to develop skill-standards systems. (LMI)

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Updating School Board Policies

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NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY NETWORK

Volume 26/Number 3
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Transition: School–to–Work

By Robyn J. Hickey

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"Enough research exists to indicate traditional abstract learning helps only 30 percent of students and hurts 70 percent. Nevertheless, we continue using abstract and theoretical education models. The task is making learning relevant and answering the question, How do you make every child successful in the next step he or she chooses?" J. D. Hoye, Director of the National School-to-Work Office in Washington, DC.

The **School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994,** passed on May 4, 1994, provides a framework to broaden educational and career opportunities for all students, primarily through *partnerships* between and among secondary schools and postsecondary educational institutions, private and public employers, labor organizations, community-based organizations, and state and local governments. A 'systems approach,' emphasizing building statewide initiatives around coherent systems that include these groups, encourages integration of functions to produce desired results.

School-to-work means significant changes in the way teachers teach and students learn in our schools. By taking advantage of the resources available in the business community, the changes can pay dividends.

The passage of another piece of national education legislation, **Goals 2000: Educate America Act,** was landmark as well in advancing high academic standards in our K-12 schools and relates to workforce preparation most directly through its Title V, which establishes a National Skill Standards Board. **Goal 6** of the national education goals, Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning, states, "By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship." By integrating school-to-work; national education goals; and occupational skill standards through the National Skill Standards Board, this program from Washington has the potential to successfully transition the foundation of American public education from where it has been to where it *should* be going.

Robyn J. Hickey is a management consultant in human resources on issues related to the field of education. Her academic, education policy and national political background qualify her as a strategist in the formulation and implementation of human capital issues.

What is School-to-Work?

Key uniform elements in an effective school-to-work program include:

- work-based learning experience;
- school-based learning that provides an integrated curriculum of academic and occupational learning;
- a high school diploma or its equivalent enabling enrollment in postsecondary and/or college-level education; and
- an occupational skill certificate enabling entry into a first job on a career path.

Clear governance in the design, implementation, and monitoring of school-to-work transition programs is essential. Also, a program of study designed to meet the same academic content standards the *state* has established for all students; career awareness, exploration, and counseling within the academic realm; and workplace mentoring should all be part of the *basic package* for a school-to-work program in a state or locality.

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A unique "output" from a state-approved school-to-work opportunities program is the ***skill certificate,*** which is a *portable, industry-recognized credential* certifying a student has mastered skills at certain levels. The National Skill Standards Board (described at the end of this article) will eventually suggest levels of occupational skill standards that will identify the knowledge, skill, and level of ability an individual needs to perform productively in a specific occupation.

It's exciting to envision the possibilities of high-quality work-related learning for those non-baccalaureate students, as well as those who are undecided about college or even those who *are* college-bound and *also* believe work-related learning is essential. A report released by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corp. (MDRC) supports the contention that new school-to-work programs can remove the taint of vocational classes. It further indicates that vocational programs combining class work and local job internships can increase interest in school among disadvantaged students.

And, what about employers who are willing to hire students or provide educational support in the local community *if* effective school-to-work programs are established? Employers are great team players in this new scenario. Justifying the rationale and growth of school-to-work programs certainly is not difficult.

The Three Components of School-to-Work

School-to-work means significant changes in the way teachers teach and students learn in our schools. It has three components: *work-based learning; school-based learning; and connecting activities.*

I. Work-Based Learning

Contextual, real-world learning through workplace experience is a definition of work-based learning — with work experience, structured training, and mentoring at job sites serving as its core elements. Employers' active participation is *essential* because of the mix of on-the-job training with related classroom instruction. Work-based learning instructs in general workplace competencies, develops industry-specific interests, and guides in the development of positive work attitudes, employability, and interactive skills.

High Performance Workplace

Much of the motivation for work-based learning stems from the realization that the new work force *and* the work place of tomorrow has already arrived. Demographic shifts, international competition, and flattening of the hierarchy due to technological advancements are necessitating new approaches to work. At a minimum, the speed of delivery of service and goods has mandated high performance workers be educated people who have the skills to move flexibly among a number of specific tasks with good judgment.

High performance workplaces are workplaces in constant change. More learning will probably be taking place in the workplace than in the school. Effective high performance workers *adapt* to these changes, — even help define and produce them. For this *continuous learning*, an adequate foundation of skills and knowledge in school or on-the-job is imperative. *Long - term employability* in a rapidly changing world of work is the goal for education and training in the high-performance workplace.

II. School-Based Learning

School-based learning as a component of a school-to-work program includes a general career exploration curriculum. It includes initial selection by interested students of a career major not later than the beginning of the 11th grade; a curriculum that integrates academic and vocational learning; a program of study designed to meet the academic content standards the State has established; and regularly scheduled evaluations, among others factors.

Curriculum

In the early years, all levels integrate: job-specific skills; workplace basic skills (such as those in the SCANS Commissions: adaptability, flexibility, resource allocation, data analysis, interpersonal); and related academic skills. *Career exploration* then begins where youth are allowed to explore and gather information about general career areas such as the environment, business, law, health and medicine. Then a broad *common core* or *industry-specific* career such as health care, can be developed from which *common clusters* such as dental, nursing, pharmacology can be delineated. The next step would lead to the *job specific* stage where advanced technical skills are learned. Finally, these skills are *transferred to higher education* studies.

School-based learning will not be delivered with ease because the states will have to rely heavily on the state

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and local education infrastructure to deliver the school-based component. Further, the states (and the locals) have the responsibility of garnering the support and participation of the employer community to deliver the work-based component for these programs and this is not a simple task. The locals can enter convincingly at this stage, especially in dealing with the business community, for they should know which business representatives can be positive partners and which businesses are less genuine in forming long-term, effective partnerships for school-to-work transition programs in their respective communities.

Integration of Academic and Vocational Learning

As fundamental "building blocks" of respective school-to-work opportunities programs, the tried and true approaches of the education and training programs listed below are often used because of their effective emphases on linking academic and vocational learning.

1. ***Cooperative education*** **(co-op)** is an early form of a school-to-work program. While participants are enrolled in an educational program, they also are employed in a structured worksite experience. Among the elements of a co-op program are the alternating schedule that allows the student to spend approximately equal periods of time alternately in full-time classes and full-time work and the parallel schedule that enables the student to spend part of each day in classes and part of each day at the worksite. More than 50,000 employers participate in co-op education across the country and appreciate the value of providing these prospective employees all the work experience necessary to become valuable future workers.

2. ***Technical preparation*** **(tech prep)** is a well-known example of integration of academic and vocational learning. It is organized in a 2 + 2 format and blends the last two years of high school with the first two years of postsecondary occupational education or an apprenticeship program of at least two years. Community colleges often are involved in these formal articulation agreements where the secondary and postsecondary institutions commit to jointly develop and implement tech prep curricula and instruction.

3. ***Career academies*** are a traditional example of integration of academic and vocational/technical learning. These are generally occupationally focused high schools that lay the foundation for careers in a vertical segment of one field, such as health care, electronics, horticulture, sports education, business education.

4. Growing in popularity, ***youth apprenticeships*** offer students both school-based and work-based learning. They combine structured, paid work and training on-the-job with related high quality classroom instruction in the high school. Effective youth apprenticeship programs require extensive coordination between employers, schools, labor, and government because of the high academic standards and high-skill career opportunities.

The intent of Congress was clear. Any partnership related to school-to-work was to contribute to the *reinvention of government* by—

(A) building on State and local capacity;

(B) eliminating duplication in education and training programs for youths by integrating such programs into a comprehensive system;

(C) maximizing the effective use of resources;

(D) supporting locally established initiatives;

(E) requiring measurable goals for performance; and

(F) offering flexibility in meeting such goals.

These fine programs, and others such as *school-to-apprenticeship, school-sponsored enterprises,* and a variety of *business-education partnerships,* among others, represent building blocks upon which to design and implement a full-scale system of school-to-work transition that provides all students with the key elements of high academic standards, real work exposure and experiences, and the smooth blend of the two to allow individuals to receive the benefits and move on *successfully* to whatever next step they choose.

III. Connecting Activities

For this third component of school-to-work, the legislation suggests providing some of the following activities:

- ✓ matching students with the work-based learning opportunities of employers;
- ✓ providing a school site mentor for each student who can act as a liaison among the student and the employer, school, teacher, parent, administrator;
- ✓ providing technical assistance to employers, particularly in designing the school-based and work-based components and counseling;
- ✓ training of teachers, workplace and school site mentors, and counselors;
- ✓ providing assistance to school and employers to integrate school-based and work-based learning (and integrating academic and occupational learning);
- ✓ encouraging the active participation of local employers;
- ✓ providing participants who have completed the program to find employment or continue their education or training;
- ✓ linking the participants with other community services to assure a successful transition.

Perhaps it is in this area — that of "connecting" — in which local boards

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and superintendents can participate to strengthen these attractive school-to-work efforts.

Hands-On Activities for Local School Boards

Partnerships

The **School to Work Opportunities Act of 1994** discusses *partnerships* with frequency and lists these institutions as basic partners:

- secondary schools;
- postsecondary educational institutions;
- private and public employers;
- labor organizations;
- government;
- labor organizations;
- State educational agencies;
- local educational agencies;
- training and human service agencies.
- parents and students.

The term ***local partnership*** means a local entity that is responsible for local school-to-work opportunities programs and that—

(A) consists of employers, representative of local educational agencies and local postsecondary educational institutions (including representatives of area vocational education schools, where applicable), local educators (such as teachers, counselors, or administrators), representatives of labor organizations or nonmanagerial employee representatives, and students; and

(B) may include other entities such as —

1) employer organizations;
2) community-based organizations;
3) national trade associations working at the local levels;
4) industrial extension centers;
5) rehabilitation agencies and organizations;
6) registered apprenticeship agencies;
7) local vocational education entities;
8) proprietary institutions of high education;
9) local government agencies;
10) parent organizations;
11) teacher organizations;
12) vocational student organizations;
13) private industry councils;
14) federally recognized Indian tribes.

Grants to States and Local Communities

States

In 1994, all states received development grants of between $200,000 and $ 750,000, which can be extended on a competitive basis to states that demonstrate the beginning of a full-scale statewide plan. Once a governor of a state submits an application, in *general*, the funds have been made available for the state to complete planning and development of a comprehensive statewide school-to-work opportunities system. As a result, with these funds, a state can: recruit and provide assistance to *employers* to provide work-based learning for students; provide training for teachers, employers, workplace mentors, counselors, and others; and work with localities to develop strategies to recruit and retain students from *all* backgrounds in school-to-work programs.

✓ THIS OUT

Can You Define the Following?

- **Criterion-referenced test**
- **Executive session**
- **Single-loaded corridor**
- **Due Process**
- **Tangible property**
- **P.L. 94-142**

Check your answers on page 9.

In the first year, state grantees must subgrant at least 70 percent to local partnerships; 80 percent in the second year; and 90 percent in the third year.

Implementation grants are also available to the states concomitant with the *planning and development grants* for states more advanced in their formulation of the school-to-work opportunities statewide system. Implementation grants assist states in actually putting into motion the system they have been planning with their development grant. They last up to five years and annually total several millions of dollars. The policy criteria discussed at length in the legislation is very useful to ascertain what is involved in receiving these grants. The first round of awards went to eight states.

Locals

In the March 9, 1994, Federal Register, the announcement of the *local partnership* grants was made. These competitive grants are to support local partnerships that have built a sound planning and development base and are ready to implement school-to-work initiatives.

The local partnership must agree: 1) that *all* amounts from the grant be used to implement a School-to-Work Opportunities program, including activities described extensively in the legislation; 2) that the plan submitted is in total agreement with the approved state plan and has been reviewed by the state; and 3) that periodic reports be submitted to the U.S. Education and Labor Secretaries as required.

Unlike state grants, local partnership grants are not for everyone. If a local partnership is ready to begin its system building efforts, but its state has not received an implementation grant, it may apply to receive a direct, federally-funded Local Partnership Grant. Awards in the first round have gone to 15 local partnerships.

The local partnership which wishes to submit an application to the U.S. Secretary of Labor and Secretary of Education for approval, must first submit to the state for review before

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submitting to the Secretaries. These grants may be renewed on an annual basis until the state in which the partnership is in the second year of a State Implementation Grant.

Urban/Rural Opportunities Grants are also available to localities. These grants are awarded competitively to enable development *and* implementation in areas with high rates of poverty. "High poverty area" is defined as an area of certain geographic characteristics with a poverty rate of 20 percent or more among individuals who have not attained the age of 22, as determined by the Bureau of the Census.

These grants may be extended up to five years, with additional federal funds added regardless of whether their state has received an Implementation Grant. Awards in the first competitions went to 21 urban/rural partnerships and were announced last August 15th.

The employer community is the key to success in any local school-to-work opportunities program. Private sector driven is often the term used to quickly describe school-to-work programs.

The Employer Community

The *employer community* is the key to success in any local school-to-work opportunities program. *Private sector driven* is often the term used to quickly describe school-to-work program. In this regard, so much has occurred, so many different types of efforts have emerged with public/private partnerships that efficient summarization is difficult. Policy points from national legislation, for example, suggest that business in general should be encouraged:

- to enter into partnerships with schools;
- to provide information and guidance to schools on the needs of area businesses for properly educated graduates in general and on the need for particular workplace skills that the schools may provide;
- to provide necessary education and training materials and support; and
- to continue the lifelong learning process throughout the employment years of an individual.

Dr. Terry Peterson, counselor to U.S. Education Secretary Riley, had some suggestions as well including:

- businesses helping encourage parental involvement;
- business allowing teachers to see new options;
- business helping in team-building and seeing each other in action, as in parents and teachers and understanding the 'loads' of others;
- business helping in team-building through organization development expertise that the company has used;
- business helping with motivation and showing that students can get hired and paid a lot of money.;
- business assessing what skills are needed around the neighborhood or vicinity and develop accordingly with the local schools.

Mobilizing the Business Sector

J. D. Hoye suggests that business representation can be facilitated if one thinks about how to mobilize business. Top on her list is to show the employer the options. To do this, the local school district might develop a continuum or conduct a cost/benefit analysis for each activity on the continuum for the nearby business sector. The low end might simply include allowing classrooms to be visited by representatives of a company. In the middle of the continuum might be found organizing tours for students at a company's facilities so the student can view what the worksite looks like or *job shadowing*. At the high end, might be actual paid, structured work experiences. Hoye says that in some cases, business participation is so low it doesn't reach over a 5 percent participation rate.

Another approach might be to have the business representatives think through the notion of *leveraging* the school-to-work connection with other goals it might want to accomplish in the community. In the skill development process, it is well known, for example, that small and medium sized businesses need more defined skills, where big businesses basically do not. This might be mentioned in conversations with local businesses which are seeking workforce entrants who can *immediately* rise to the occasion and be productive employees in a high performing workplace.

Workplace mentoring can be popular because it utilizes existing company employees, which only inspires goodwill within a company. This personal mentor possesses the skills and knowledge the student wishes to master in the workplace, instructs the student, critiques his or her performance, challenges the student to perform well and works in consultation with the students' classroom teachers and employer.

Conclusion

The possibilities are almost infinite in terms of how a school-to-work connection can be put together between and among all the potential partners that can be included in the process. To structure or systemize would be incorrect because there is no one correct way. Any systemization would also run counter to the *voluntary* nature that undergirds all these national initiatives after years, if not decades, of learning that schooling is a *local matter and should remain so*.

Some dissenters argue that the "feds" only want to intervene and tell everyone what to do. This is not true. The types of national initiatives that have done well, because of lessons learned, can only *help — not hinder* — educational progress in America because

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they draw the best from models around the country.

Because there is no mechanism to force employers' involvement, the local school board can begin to develop "connecting" networks with businesses in their communities. Employers are typically recruited individually through personal contacts from an elected or school official. Companies get involved either because they have an interest in training or from a sense of civic responsibility. But participation in a school-to-work program provides no guaranteed return to a business directly, as opposed to their community and nation as a whole, so the response rate may not be high, particularly when the business is experiencing a downturn.

Local boards can help by coordinating the students' acquisition of skills with what is needed in the workplace. Employers can get involved by writing curriculum and planning and administering procedures for interviewing students and matching them with part-time job openings or providing facilities and teachers for classroom instruction. Defining work-based learning in the community and designing the regulating of it can also be a valuable input from employers. It is inevitable, though, that employers will often have interests divergent from those of the schools.

The best school-to-work programs work on a voluntary basis. Through personal and direct business contacts, local school boards play a strong leadership role in forming the most effective school-to-work programs. ■

Occupational Skill Standards

Goals 2000 Title V establishes a 28-member National Skills Standards Board whose primary function is ***identifying broad clusters of major occupations that involve one or more industries in the United States so common skill standards can be developed among industries.***

J. D. Hoye has suggested two points regarding the National Skills Standards Board. The first would be to conduct its actions on a *regional* basis. As industry standards are derived in conjunction with the participants and stakeholders, interests of a specific region should be taken into account over a broad national interest. Economic interests within a region dominate what types of jobs are created within an area which in turn influences the curriculum and course offerings developed by educators.

Secondly, Hoye believes it would be useful for the National Board to focus on occupational clusters for training in key industries to enhance universal certification of occupational skills. If occupational clusters are formed, companies across an industry in which the participants train can learn to recognize and respect the use of the certificate.

In the formative stages, a *major* function of the National Skills Board was to facilitate the establishment of ***voluntary*** partnerships to develop skill standards systems. The leaders who foresaw the value of this reasoned that standards approved by a 28-member National Skill Standards board could serve as a passport to the best paying blue collar jobs for millions of high school graduates who do not go onto college. These could lead to guideposts for the nation's public schools to prepare high school graduates for a workforce where earnings increasingly reflect education.